

MEDIA RELEASE

SBA SOUTH CAROLINA DISTRICT OFFICE

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Greenwood Community Produces Unprecedented Number Of SBA Small Business Award Winners

GREENWOOD, S.C. – The Greenwood area is home to four 2008 U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) small business award winners for South Carolina. Samuel M. Leaman of the Upper Savannah Council of Governments is the SBA Financial Services Champion of the Year; Claire F. Kuhl of V&R Consulting is the Home-based Business Champion of the Year for both the state *and* the southeast region; Harley Funeral Home is the Jeffrey Butland Family-Owned Business of the Year; and the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce is the Small Business Partner of the Year, a special SBA district director award.

- **Samuel Leaman** is the 2008 Assistant Director of the Upper Savannah Council of Governments (COG), where he has worked since 1985. As manager of the COG loan programs, Leaman educates small business owners in the six-county service area about their financing options, focusing on public sector programs that are best suited to small companies' unique circumstances. He also regularly uses SBA loan guaranty programs to help small businesses secure much-needed capital. Since the start of the COG loan programs in 1988, Leaman has made 61 loans totaling \$15,232,120.

Outside of his day-to-day duties, Leaman advocates for legislative action and changes in the financial services industry to benefit the small business community. He often works with business development organizations – such as the Small Business Development Center and South Carolina Export Consortium – and recently participated as a guest speaker for FastTrac® GrowthVenture™.

Leaman was nominated for the Financial Services Champion award by Angelle LaBorde, president of the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce.

- **Claire Kuhl** is the owner of V&R Consulting. Kuhl's first experience with home-based business came early in life – fifth grade to be exact – when she started offering piano lessons from her family's living room. Forty years later, she has become a champion of home-based businesses. A former corporate professional, Kuhl used her expertise to launch V&R Consulting in 2004 to help small and home-based business owners “maximize their intellectual capital,” giving them access to the same tools – such as project management and staff development – that major corporations depend on.

Kuhl's efforts extend beyond the scope of her company. Through her membership in organizations like the Greenwood Area Chamber of Commerce, Kuhl not only provides frequent free business seminars, but she also reaches out to home-based business owners across Greenwood County to provide them with one-on-one mentoring.

Kuhl was nominated for the Home-Based Business Champion award by Jeffrey Smith Director for Small Business and Communications for the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce.

- The **Harley Funeral Home**, which has been serving the Greenwood area since 1947, spans three generations of the Harley family.

L. Ruple Harley, Jr., the current president of Harley Funeral Home, has been a part of the family business since 1964. He has served presidential terms for both the South Carolina Funeral Directors Association and the National Funeral Director's Association (NFDA). During Harley's tenure as president of the NFDA, the organization instituted major changes in funeral protocol for military veterans to allow all eligible veterans the dignity of military funeral honors.

According to Harley: "Funerals should be like snowflakes, with each one showing the person's personality and the gift of his or her life." Under his leadership, Harley Funeral Home continues to provide members of the community with the dignity and compassion they deserve.

The Harley Funeral Home was nominated for the Family-Owned Business award by Jeffrey Smith.

- With small business owners making up the majority of its membership, the **Greenwood Chamber of Commerce** is a natural advocate for small business. Not only does the Chamber foster general economic growth, but it also focuses specifically on small business success through programs and events such as its Small Business of the Year awards and Small Business Conference. Additionally, the Greenwood Chamber partners with local SCORE counselors to provide free mentoring to small business owners.

In 2006, the Chamber developed a strategic plan to ensure the Greenwood community's success through concentrated small business development.

This past year, the Greenwood Chamber helped to spotlight the diverse talents of their small business members by nominating many of their small business members for SBA awards.

The Greenwood-area winners will be honored at the SBA South Carolina District Office's small business awards ceremony, part of the 5th Annual Salute to Small Business on Tuesday, April 1, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

All SBA programs and services are provided on a non-discriminatory basis.

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